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ABSTRACT

CLAIMING THAT THE ACTUAL LEARNING OF BASIC LANGUAGE SKILLS TAKES PLACE IN THE LANGUAGE LABORATORY, THE AUTHOR STATES FOUR REQUISITES FOR EFFECTIVE USE OF THE LABORATORY: (1) A CLEAR STATEMENT OF SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES, (2) INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT, (3) REALISTIC OBJECTIVES, AND (4) STUDENT REWARDS. TESTING, LEARNING THEORY, APPLIED LINGUISTICS, DISCRIMINATION TRAINING, PATTERN DRILLS, AND ANALOGY ARE EXAMINED WITH THE PRIME CONSIDERATION OF STUDENT MOTIVATION IN MIND. THE CLOSE COORDINATION OF THE CLASSROOM AND THE LANGUAGE LABORATORY IS SEEN AS BEING VITAL TO THE JUSTIFICATION OF LABORATORY USE. (RL)

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OBJECTIVES, TESTS, AND MOTIVATION*

by Karl S. Pond

EVERY semester, since September, 1948, the same ritual occurred in my beginning French classes. Student after student would object to being forced to attend regular laboratory sessions and I, on the other hand, would insist that they go, giving them countless reasons why they should.

I hope that you have noted my use of the past tense, for the ritual no longer takes place. The need for it no longer exists. Today, we do not talk about the laboratory. Instead, we talk French; and therein, I feel, lies the secret of a successful laboratory operation.

After 18 years as a laboratory director, I have resigned from that post—finally convinced that what most language departments want in a laboratory director is simply a good mechanic and a quiet, orderly administrative assistant. This attitude, however, conflicts violently with my concept of the job of laboratory director, for I believe that it is impossible to direct any operation successfully when there is no need for it. In a department where the students feel no daily, urgent need to master the spoken language, there is simply no need for a laboratory, and no laboratory director with academic self-respect can hold that position with any degree of professional satisfaction.

In order to understand the proper role of the laboratory and its director with the language department, one must look in depth at the whole field of foreign language teaching, and, in particular, at two broad and crucial areas.

First, we must look at the field of learning theories, and secondly, at the field of applied linguistics.

From the psychology of learning and learning theories, several salient points seem to reoccur with such frequency that even the greatest skeptic cannot totally ignore them. The first point is that in order to learn, a student must be motivated, and the greatest motivation takes place when learning fulfills a need felt by the student. Frankly speaking, we must admit that very few students feel any immediate, pressing need to learn a foreign language. Even in cases where the instructor is able to instill a vague, long-range need in the student, that felt need is rarely sufficient to sustain the daily effort necessary to learn a foreign language. Learning French, German or Russian is a vague, long-term

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goal for which the general education student feels very little need. Many instructors of foreign language seem oblivious to this fact. Others, who are aware of it, make brave attempts at motivation by means of frequent testing. It is undoubtedly true that a majority of students will respond to this motivation. Unfortunately, the tests used, by and large, are spelling, vocabulary or grammar tests, depending mostly on the written word. Under these circumstances, why, I ask you, should students attend laboratory sessions and work diligently to master audio-lingual material when it has little or no bearing on tests and grades they will get in the classroom? In many colleges and universities, it would be violently denied that this situation still exists. Yet, when asked to tell specifically what percentage of the grades are based on speaking ability, the answers are usually so vague that even an expert has difficulty in arriving at a concrete figure. In the case of listening comprehension, answers are much clearer, but the figure seldom amounts to more than 30%. It is no small wonder that the average student feels that laboratory time is wasted time. No wonder, my friends, that students continually complain to instructors about the laboratory.

If optimum learning is to take place in the laboratory, specific goals must be declared in the classroom for the laboratory work which is to take place before the next meeting of the class. These *laboratory goals*, if they are to be effective must have the following characteristics:

1. Each goal must be specific. To go over the tapes of Lesson 29 is not a specific goal. In the first place, *to go over* is not clear. It cannot be evaluated. The way most textbooks are constructed, Lesson 29 probably includes a rather wide variety of audio-lingual exercises, each of which has a specific goal. A more realistic goal might be stated as follows: You will have to respond correctly, orally and without hesitation to all the stimulus sentences in Exercise C of Lesson 29 with books closed. If the term *correctly*, as used in stating this goal, must be defined, the student can be told that a correct answer means an answer identical to the taped confirmations.

2. Each goal must be stated in terms of what the student will have to do in order to demonstrate that he has properly achieved it. In the case which I have stated above, the student knows clearly what he has to do. In class, he will have to respond orally to the problem sentences of Exercise C. How and when the student works to accomplish this is immaterial. If he can do it without attending the laboratory, I see no reason why we should object. Furthermore, the amount of time he has to spend to accomplish the goal is also immaterial. One student may have to spend only 15 minutes, another one hour and 15 minutes. The only important thing is that he be able to perform correctly during the next class period.

3. Each goal must be limited as to size. It would undoubtedly be simpler to tell the students to know Exercises A, B, C, D, and F of Lesson 29, rather than specifying each exercise as a separate goal. If you do, however, you will lose a great deal of motivational power. Students will work more effectively if they feel they can work for a short span of time and accomplish a concrete result. A language such as French, even a lesson such as Lesson 29, is usually so broad that a student feels lost when dealing with such units. A specific exercise, on the other hand, is small and concrete. Achievement, or success if you will, can be easily and frequently accomplished when you assign goals of very limited size.

4. Students must be rewarded for having achieved the goals assigned. Whether this is done in the classroom or in the laboratory is immaterial as long as the grade assigned becomes an important part of his overall grade.

From the remarks that I have made concerning laboratory objectives, it should be obvious that what we are really looking for is a way of programming our laboratory period that allows the student to meet constant success in the pursuit of his work. In a field where needs are not felt by the student, this repeated success will provide high and steady motivation.

A second point often made in learning theories, however, could very well negate all the programming effort we might make for our students to meet frequent success. The point is that a learner, before he can be taught a response and thereby achieve a goal, must have the capacity to emit that response. If he doesn't he could try forever and never succeed. Too often, in foreign language teaching or laboratory programming, we assume entirely too much. We feel that if he possesses the physical characteristics to learn one language, he is automatically endowed with the capacity to produce desired responses in another. Nothing could be further from the truth. A student, for example, who is attempting to learn to produce a pattern drill whose objective is to teach the spoken forms of the present subjunctive of *-ir* verbs in context, cannot possibly succeed unless he is first in command of the production of certain French phonemes. Many students are asked in effect to make sweeping generalizations on linguistic phenomena based on sound differences without having ever been taught to discriminate between the very sound differences involved in making the new generalization. A student simply cannot succeed in a drill involving past participles ending in a given phoneme unless he has been taught to produce that phoneme properly. It becomes extremely important in our laboratory programming to provide for the mastery of certain goals before certain others are attempted. If not, the student might meet with nothing but failure, even with seem-

ingly simple, limited goals. It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to point out to the individual student what goals he is to accomplish first and to make sure that he does it.

If from the field of learning theories we implemented only the two points mentioned, I am convinced that we could make tremendous strides both in our laboratory and classroom programs. The students would then know exactly why they are in the laboratory as well as what they are supposed to do. They would succeed often and be rewarded.

Since, in the laboratory, we are primarily dealing with sounds, the field of applied linguistics is the second area which can help us most. The student most difficult to motivate is the beginning student. Being faced with the monumental task of learning a new language, unable to express himself, meeting a new sound system, he is the most likely to get quickly discouraged. If we wish to help him, it is most important that we build and present our materials in the laboratory in a way which will enable him to achieve constant success. It is at this point that the language pattern concept, born out of the application of linguistics, must be strictly applied. First, we should emphasize contrastive techniques where all the student has to do is to make a distinction between minimal pairs. This is done today to some extent, but not sufficiently. Every time new verb forms, adjective forms, pronoun forms, etc., are introduced, the laboratory materials should include contrastive drills for these new forms. I predict, however, that even then, optimal learning in discrimination would still not take place. You can tell a student that a given sound difference between two forms is important and drill him on it, and he may still only go through the motions and fail to learn it. He will only learn it if it is important to him. If, on the other hand, he knows that he will have a small quiz, either in the laboratory or the classroom, wherein he will have to identify the two sounds correctly, he will learn it for two reasons: First, it is not a difficult task, and second, he knows that he will make a good grade.

After discriminatory training should come pattern drills for production of speech. These early pattern drills should be based strictly on the linguistic principle of analogy from frame to frame. For example, in a drill intended to teach students certain verb forms, the student should not have to worry constantly about changing a possessive adjective in addition to the verb form. The drills should be designed so that a sufficient number of frames occur by analogy so that a generalization has a chance to take place, and so that the student can answer correctly without effort or hesitation. This does not mean that the students should not have tests or scrambled drills. It simply means that the student should be given a great deal of analogical drills for each form before he is asked to make a choice from among several forms for each drill frame.

I have chosen only a few basic ideas from applied linguistics and learning theories which can help us in motivating our students to greater efforts, both in the lab and in the classroom. Even a cursory survey of these two areas can reveal many more.

Two objections to the ideas presented in this paper usually arise among professional language people. Many fear that the idea of small objectives, easily attainable, will result in too many *A's*, and give the students a false sense of security. This will not occur if the grading system is designed as follows: 1/3 of the total grade is an average of all the small quizzes; 1/3 is based on three hour-tests; and 1/3 is based on a final examination. It should be pointed out, however, that the students who continually make 90 to 100% on the small objective quizzes will usually do quite well on the hour tests and the final. I further fail to see why we should be unhappy because we have a high percentage of *A's* and *B's*, as long as we have not lowered the standards. What this paper is actually advocating is to bring more and more students to higher and higher standards by leading them by small successful steps through the maze of language learning.

Today, my students no longer talk about the laboratory in the classroom. I do not force them to go to the laboratory. Now they spend as much as ten times the required laboratory time each week—not because they have to go, but because they know that it is important to them if they wish to succeed in class. The heart of basic language learning does not take place in the classroom. It takes place in the laboratory where the student practices his basic patterns. The classroom is where re-entry or re-integration of the patterns takes place within a meaningful situation. In the laboratory the students practice the building blocks of language. In the classroom they practice the language.

Because of the close relationship between the laboratory and the classroom, the laboratory director must be more than a custodian of mechanical devices. He should also be in complete charge of the beginning courses, so as to insure a complete coordination of the language program. He must be well versed in linguistics, learning theories, and general methodology. Last, and least important, he should be mechanically inclined. Recently, a foreign language professor, who was looking for a laboratory director, told me that what he was looking for was a laboratory director, not someone who would tell the teacher what to teach or how to teach. My reaction at the time was to wish him luck and to drop the subject, for it is that very attitude which leads to inefficient laboratory programs for bored students. The overall objectives must be decided in the classroom with student motivation as a primary factor. If these objectives are such that laboratory work is not an absolute necessity, let me respectfully suggest, dear colleagues, that we fold our booths and silently steal away.

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